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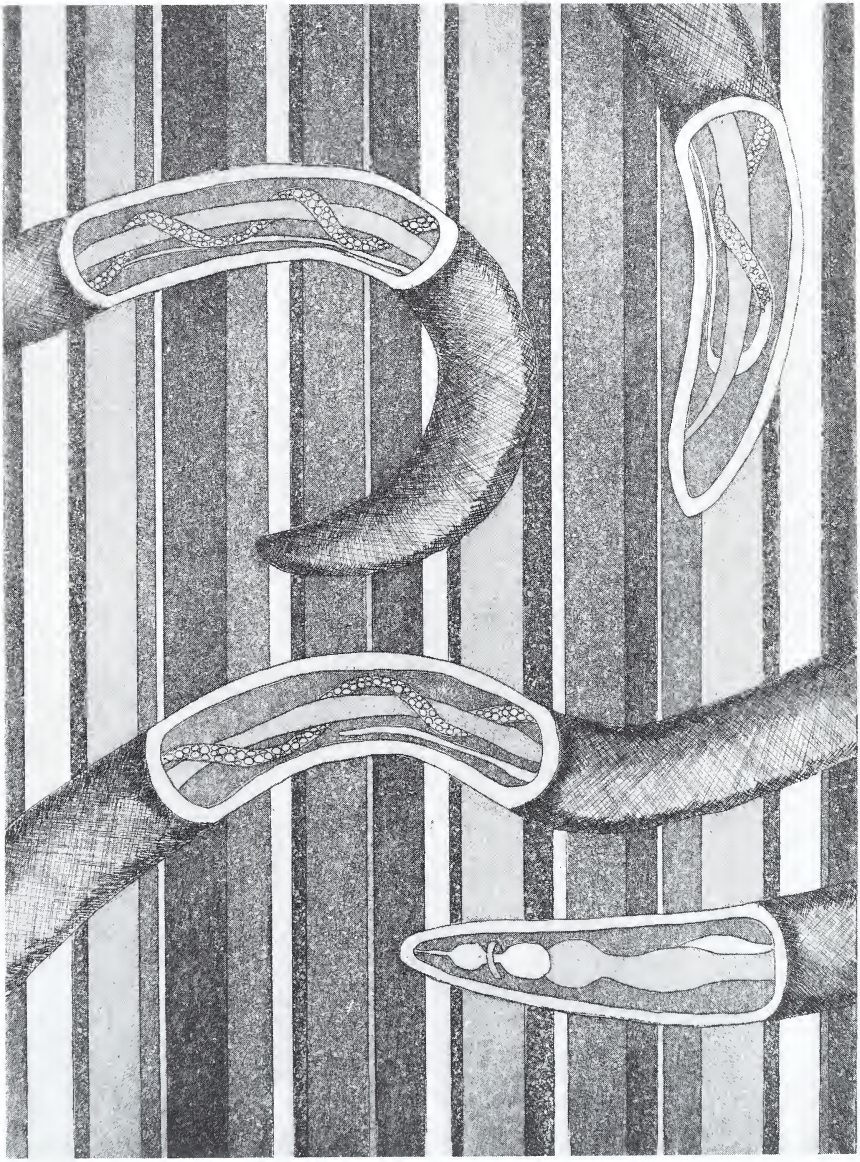

CHRISTIANA IRVING

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DUSTY FIGS

The buzzing of the giant fan as it was being towed through the orchard did not scare us, but served to build our nervous excitement. Denny and I were perched in the top of a gnarled fig tree waiting for the fan to get to us. With arms and legs wrapped tightly around a secure limb, I looked up at Denny and watched the knuckles of her hands and toes turn whiter as the rumbling and the swooshing came closer.

"Hey Denny, what if it blows us outa the tree?"

"Shut up, stupid! It's not gonna blow us anywhere. Just hold on tight and button up."

Mumbling childish obscenities to myself I squeezed tighter to the rough limb. Gradually the branches around my opossumed body began to sway gently, lightly tickling my neck and feet. I snickered with delighted apprehension.

"Hang on tight," Denny yelled, "here it comes!".

As if on cue the tree began to shake violently. Figs, dirt, branches, leaves, and bugs, shot at our bodies like rivets. The engine of the enormous fan drowned out our chattered words of encouragement. I thought of covering my ears from the roar of the motor, but swiftly erased the idea for fear of finding myself in the mouth of the fan. The last thing I wanted was an "I-told-you-not-to-go-near-the-orchards" lecture from my mother as I lay stitched and dying in Saint Agnes Hospital. The noise could be endured.

As quickly as the pounding wind was upon us, it left us. The air was still once more.

"Denny," I whispered, "are ya ok?"

Silence.

I craned my head upward and scanned the upper limbs for my storm lost friend.

"Denny," I shouted, "where are ya?"

A sullen voice answered, "Down here."

Tilting my head down I spotted Denny spitting dirt from her teeth while picking squashed figs from the seat of her pants. Grinning with devilish delight I swung down from the tree and plopped next to my dusty friend.

"You fell outa the tree!"

"So big deal. I lost my balance, that's all."

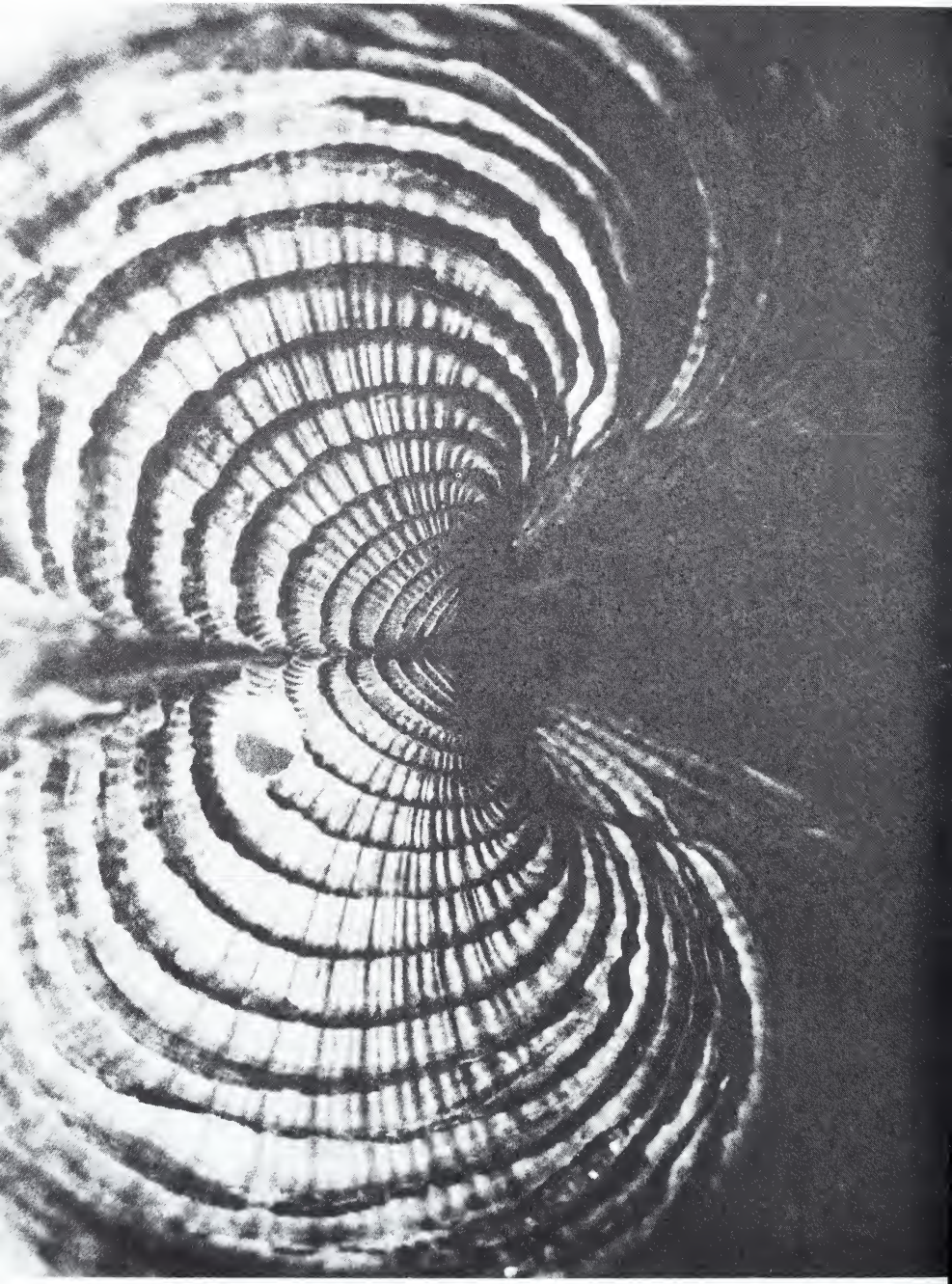
"You fell outa the tree!" I taunted.

"Stop laughing, Ruth, or you'll be sorry!" Phut, a last minute fig squished itself on Denny's hair. Wide-eyed I watched the sticky mess ooze through her hair. Forgetting her threat I covered my mouth with my hand and jumped up and down like an hysterical monkey. Denny did not know whether she should belt me one, wipe the top of her head, or continue to pick the gooey mess from the seat of her pants. As she stood there motionless watching me crow with laughter, she began to giggle. Then her giggling grew to chuckling, and finally she too was cackling alongside of me.

As we kicked and screamed with delight in the orchard, old man Haskle across the street scratched his head unbelievingly. He had seen the whole episode, and he thought we were nuts.

We were, Mr. Haskle, we were.

FRANCES RUTH



CARMEN YANEZ

BIRTHSTONE

Hazy
shifting
edges cloud
mute reality
Glittering
splintered
reflections hold
instant light
Flaring fires make
a
sudden
wall
Restless
changing
shadows merge
black with white
Bright stone becomes
insecure
security
Opalescent me.

MARGARET TALVIN

ELAINE PRIEST

MARINA KONTOS

CARMEN YANEZ

THE CALL

"Yahweh said to Abraham, 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you.' "

Genesis

"The weather in Spokane is a chilly forty degrees. Skies are clear. Winds are fifteen miles per hour. We should be touching down on schedule in one hour. I hope your flight is pleasant."

I looked out of the window at the top of the cloud cover. Dusk was just approaching. I'd be there by dark. Something had told me all along that it wouldn't work. Who could leave a good job, a nice home, and all the family friends and take off to the back of beyond and expect to make a go of it? It couldn't work. I had told Dad he was throwing his life away when he announced the move last July. He said they had to go anyway—that it was some kind of a call he had to follow. I couldn't argue with that since I had already been called to the religious life. But I couldn't understand. It didn't seem logical. Mom called it a dream they couldn't live with unless they tried it out. I had hoped it would work when they left, but now I sensed something had gone wrong. Nobody had said anything, but I could read between the lines in my sister's letters. Soon I would know.

"Fasten your seat belts" was flashing just above me. Looking out of the window I could see that the wind had pushed away the cloud cover. The night lights blinked a chilly welcome. I wondered who would be at the airport. I tried to brace myself for whatever would face me in the next two weeks. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe everything was fine.

As I descended the stairs, the burning in my throat left me speechless when I recognized Dad. He looked dreadful. I hugged him tightly, then went inside to meet the rest of the family.

"It's so good to have you home!" Mom sighed. Something in her eyes scared me.

"You'd better believe it," Peggy muttered.

"It's good to be here, too. I can't believe it's almost a year since I last saw you! How are things?"

"Rick's doing fine in school," Mom offered. "You didn't say hello to him yet. Don't you recognize him?"

"Hello, Sister Ignoramus," jeered a deep voice.

"Richard!" warned Mom.

"You've got to be kidding! How did you get so tall—and where did you get that deep voice?"

Rick just grinned and grabbed my bags. He really was a fine looking young man—a little thin, but most teen-age boys go through that stage.

"Well, come on!" I urged. "Let's stop standing around!"

Dad led the way to the Volkswagon bus. "I'm dying to see your new home. How far away is it?" I wanted to know.

"About an hour and a half," Peggy said. "You have to go slow at night because the deer come out on the highway. The headlights blind them and if you hit one, you've got a mashed-up car!"

All the way home Rick prided himself in pointing out landmarks in the dark. The headlights tunneled a glimpse into a wilderness of evergreens. There was a freedom and majesty about this North country that made me hear the same call which my family had followed.

". . .And this is the Pend Oreille River which you are now crossing for the sixth time. There is water in this river, a novelty to most southern Californians. Be sure to breathe in our fresh clean air. Unlike Metropolitan Los Angeles, our air contains no pollutants. In other words, you will not be able to take a bite out of it and chew it up." Rick rambled on and on.

"Where does he get it all?" I asked.

"It comes from an over-excercised brain," Peggy answered.

Soon the headlights circled into a dirt road, past what had to be the gift shop and stopped alongside a rustic house.

"Is it finished?" I asked.

"All except the windows. There was a shortage on glass so we boarded them up, and it kept the heat in better in the winter that way, too. We had three feet of snow here for the last seven months!" I could tell Dad was proud of his self-built home, and it was worthy of his pride.

"Come on in and see the inside," Mom said.

Yes, it was a masterpiece. It surpassed all my expectations. The Swiss architecture suited the antique furniture. From the inside you couldn't tell that there were no windows. Mom had done an excellent job on the drapes.

"Lauri, you must be tired after the trip. Let me fix some hot chocolate and then you can get some rest. You and Peggy are sleeping in the den. I hope you won't be too cold."

"Thanks, Mom. Hot chocolate sounds good," I replied. "You've got a beautiful place here, and what I could see of the store when we turned in looked really cute. How is it doing? Do you have a lot of contributors? What kind of things are you making for it?"

"Oh, it's well stocked. You'll have to go down and see it tomorrow," Mom said. "I've got three punch-needle rugs displayed, and I've made a lot of aprons

and bean-bags. Dad's leather work really takes people's fancy. He does a better job than professionals do. He's made all kinds of things—wallets, purses, luggage-tags, key cases, belts—even a gun holster!"

"That really sounds good. What's Peg been doing?"

"Oh, Peggy's been keeping busy with her crocheting. She's been dressing character dolls, too. And you should see the darling curler caddies she makes from oatmeal boxes!"

"Really?"

"Yes, and right now Dad is working on some carpentry. He's made some bread boards and some spice racks that seem popular. A lot of the local folks have hobbies and send in things to be sold, too. We've got some beautiful hand-made jewelry down there."

"Gosh, Mom, I can't wait to see all this!"

The chocolate sizzled as it bubbled over on the electric range. Mom jumped for it, just as I remembered her doing so often when I was a kid.

"Don't you ever take it easy, Mom?"

"No, Lauri. I tried it, but I couldn't stand doing nothing. It gives me a cabin fever. I've got to keep moving and know that I've got room to move in. Hope you like the chocolate. We use dry milk up here because the fresh milk is too expensive. We're all used to it now, but it'll probably be a big change for you."

"It's fine, Mom. It hits the spot on a cold night."

"Cold? Who's cold? It's not cold. You should have been here when it was cold! Why it was so cold we even turned off the refrigerator. The water pipes froze so we had automatic ice for our tea. We had to chop logs for the fire with an ice pick, then melt them before they'd burn. The dog even froze one night so we had to give him a shot of brandy to thaw him out. Have you ever seen a drunk dog?"

Rick would have continued, but Mom said, "Mr. Big-Mouth, your chocolate is getting COLD!"

I still found forty degrees cold for late June. Even snuggled under the blankets in bed it was cold. As I tried to block out all the breezy passages in the sheets, I said, "Peg, are you sleepy?"

"No."

"I want to ask you something."

"O.K."

"I was shocked when I saw Dad. Has he been sick?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean he's gone totally gray, his neck is sagging, and he's lost an awful lot of weight. He looks like death warmed over. I almost cried when I saw him. In fact, I didn't even recognize him at first."

"No, he's not been sick."

"For heaven's sake what's wrong with him?"

"He's just been working hard and hasn't had much to eat. I think he's been worrying a lot too. He's lost seventy pounds."

"You're telling me. It looks more like a hundred. Why hasn't he been eating? And what's he so worried about? Isn't the business doing well?"

"No."

"What do you mean? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"You couldn't do anything about it. What I mean is we can't make ends meet. We're not even breaking clear on the store. The people here are so stingy they wouldn't even spend enough breath to pass you the time of day. Mom's gone off her rocker and if she's ever o.k. again it won't be this town's fault. If Rick doesn't grow up warped from malnutrition it'll be a miracle. We spend less than ten dollars a week on food and it's supposed to feed four! Lauri, I can't stay here any longer. I've got to get out. Mom is driving me loco. And she'll kill me if she finds out I've told you this because she didn't want you to know."

That was the earful I was dreading. "Peg, I don't know how you've kept it in so long. But don't you think things will pick up now that the tourist season is coming?"

"That's what they keep saying. But do you know how long the tourist season lasts? Two months. Two measly months. In two months how can you earn enough money to last the other ten? This whole venture was a big mistake. Why did we come up here just to go bankrupt? Dad was so sure a year ago that this was the right move. But, my Lord, can't he see that it was the dumbest thing he ever did?"

"Peggy, don't say that!"

"Why not? It's true. He got us into this mess and he's got to get us out!"

"But didn't you all agree to try this? How does Mom feel?"

"Oh, haven't you noticed? She doesn't feel anymore. She's gone bananas. Sure we all agreed to come. But all we bargained for was the dream home where 'the grass grows wild and wind blows free.' We didn't bargain for a house where your mind goes mad and poverty grows free. Did you happen to notice Mom's eyes?"

"Yes, they really startled me."

"What do they remind you of?"

"The only thing I can think of is the picture of the Jews in the German concentration camps."

"You've got the point, Lauri. That's just about what we've all been through. And I just hope the whole situation sinks through Dad's thick skull before any one of us takes an overdose of aspirin."

"Do you know if Mom and Dad have talked it over?"

"You don't really understand, do you? Mom is out of her mind! Dad can't talk to her. I can't talk to her. In fact, nobody can. If anybody even mentions finances she bursts into tears and starts to scream.

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"Are you kidding? She wouldn't go near a doctor with a ten foot pole. Especially not a shrink. As far as that goes, we couldn't afford it."

"Have you told Dad how you feel?"

"Heck no! You know Dad and I never got along together. You were always his girl. I couldn't talk to him. We just don't understand each other. You'd be better able to talk to him. Gosh, I'm glad you're here, Lauri. At least I can talk to you. And you'll be a good distraction for Mom too. Maybe she won't be harping on me so much now. I just wish you could stay longer."

"Peggy, I just wish there was something I could do to help. Is there anything at all?"

"I don't know, Lauri. Just be here. You've done a lot by just letting me talk. Maybe you can try to talk to Dad. He's worrying himself to death, but that's no way out. I don't know what is, though. Just think about it. Anyway, I've got a long day sitting in the store tomorrow."

"Sure, Peg. Get a good sleep."

As the silence settled, events whirled in my brain. My throat tightened and burned. I wanted to cry over the sorry plight of my own family. Why didn't things work out? Why did it happen this way? What went wrong? Why had they come? A call? Maybe. Here? I don't know. How could it be? And what next? Who knows. I drifted into a trouble sleep.

It was three days before Dad got the opportunity to ease his mind. I had spent hours watching people wander into the shop, look around, and wander back out. It was depressing. Dad spent most of his time at his workbench. I went in and sat up on his sawhorse, listening to the shrill ring of the power saw as it bit into the smooth pine. In a minute Dad flicked the switch and the blade whirred to silence.

"What are you making?" I inquired.

"A corner-shelf. Hand me the plane."

The swish of the plane on the edges of the wood pushed up the paper-thin pine curls, and they dropped lightly to the floor.

"Do you remember how Peg and I used to play with all your wood shavings? And remember the black widow spider we hid in the saw dust pile until Mom found out?"

"Those were the good times, Lauri. It's not like that any more." Dad put down his work and stretched his back. He sat down on the sawhorse and dangled his arms between his spread knees. Tears welled in my eyes.

"Lauri, where did I go wrong? Where did I fail? What did I do to deserve this? Why is God punishing me?"

I bit the inside of my lower lip as he continued.

"I've tried and tried. I've worked so hard, and just look at where it's got me. What did I do wrong? It seemed so good. What should I have done that I didn't do? I wish to God I'd never even heard of this place!"

"Oh, Dad!"

He put his arm around me and said, "Lauri, I didn't want to drag you into this too, but I'm glad you came. We all really thought I was doing the right thing when I gave up construction for this. Everything pointed this way. But how long are we supposed to live through this plague-take-it mess! I've done everything I can think of to make it work. But it's all backfired. I was so sure we were supposed to come up here! It seemed like such a strong call."

"What now, Dad?" I whispered.

"Now I'm not sure of anything except I've got to get a job that we can live on. We can't last much longer this way." Dad glanced at his watch. "Let's go clean up for dinner."

The wood was crackling and popping invitingly in the Franklin stove as we sat down to freshly cooked oatmeal and hot dogs.

"He who eats the fastest gets the most," chanted Rick as he dug into his bowl.

"You creep," muttered Peggy, glaring in his direction.

Dad wiped his mouth. "I've been thinking lately," he began.

"Well there's plenty of time for that," said Mom.

Dad started over. "I've been wondering how we can make a go of this place."

"We can't," Mom retorted.

"Maybe we should sell out," Dad ventured.

"What sucker would be dumb enough to buy up here?" Mom's bitterness showed.

"I don't know, honey, but is there anything else we can do?"

"Die!" Mom snapped.

"I can't stand it here any longer!" Peggy's eyes were flashing.

"None of us can," Dad reassured. "I'll put the place up for sale tomorrow."

"But Dad, where would we go?" asked Peggy.

"I don't know yet. Wherever I can get work. I guess that's where we belong." Dad's voice was shaking.

Peggy let out a relieved sigh. "I'll sure be glad to go anywhere."

"Under the prevailing circumstances, I foresee this decision as a very wise move, and therefore I consent to follow wherever you go."

"Big deal. You haven't got a choice, Ricky!" Peggy jeered.

I looked at Mom, who weakly nodded, and, reeling, left the table. Peggy followed her out.

Dad bowed his head and shook it silently. "Now where to, Lord?"

SISTER MARY JUDITH DIETERLE, S.S.L.

CARMEN YANEZ

SHIRLEY'S CALL

Her keys clanked together until, finding the right one, she inserted it into the lock. Watching her, Susan felt her own heart beating faster. The two stepped through the door, and she locked it behind them. She smiled reassuringly at Susan and then began walking down the short corridor. Self-consciously, Susan tried to wipe any signs of fear off her face, and even tried to look casual. It was not easy. Her first time here, she did not know what to expect. Suddenly she felt panicked. Oh, God, what am I doing here? Take it easy, she calmed herself, I'm here because she called me.

The corridor led them into the ward. Immediately a strong odor—a mixture of antiseptic and poor bathroom ventilation—reached their noses. It sickened her. The patients, spotting the stranger walking in with their nurse, came to investigate. The nurse greeted them:

"Hi there, Sims, how are you today? Hi, Ruthie, how's it going? Hi, girls."

Susan, watching her calm manner, wished she could relax.

"This is Susan, girls." The patients crowded around Susan, running their hands slowly over her face, touching her nose, her cheeks, stroking her hair. She had been told to expect anything, but she wanted to shake their hands off, to run away. Yet she stood her ground, reassuring herself. Thoughts raced through her mind. It's all right. They're not responsible. They don't know any better. But I wish they'd stop. Oh, God, she's here—in this place. . .It's all his fault. That drunk! She called me; that's why I'm here. . .But I wish they'd stop touching me.

Finally, after an eternal minute, the nurse said,"All right, girls, we have to go. I'll be back later." She looked at Susan, "Let's go on now. She's down at the end of the ward. Her commitment papers say she has four children."

"Yes, she has four girls, all in grammar school."

Susan weakly followed the nurse. Her eyes scanned the building. Small cell-like rooms ran the length of the tile corridor. Even the colorful doors did little to brighten the look of depressing oldness that filled the halls. The nurse gave a tour as they walked:

"These are the rooms the girls stay in. . .This is the supply room where the extra clothing and the shoes are kept. . .This is the lavatory." Seeing Susan's surprise, she explained further, "There are no doors on the toilets so we can keep an eye on the patients in case of emergency. . .This is the isolation cell. It's padded so the patients can't hurt themselves."

"Do you use it often?"

"It depends. Right now there is a patient in there."

"Why?"

"It's for her own protection. You see, she bangs herself against the wall. She won't eat and throws her food around."

"What can you do to help her?"

"Not much. We give her a shot to keep her drugged. Otherwise she can be harmful."

"Harmful?"

"Yes. For example, the other day she had an attack and smeared her BM all over the walls and herself and then just sat there."

Susan shuddered. "What did you do?"

"She was made to clean it up, and then put in a straight-jacket."

A straight-jacket, Susan thought to herself. It sounds like something out of a movie. She felt chills go up and down her body. Her heart felt heavy. I hope they don't try to put Shirley in one of those.

Reaching the end of the corridor, the nurse said, "You can't go into this section. It'll just take me a couple of minutes to get your sister."

Left by herself, Susan felt a surge of panic. What is this all about, anyway? I wish I could get away from here this minute! But I can't. She called me. I need to help her. I will help her. . .She doesn't belong here. Susan watched the patients in the nearby recreation room. Some were sitting quietly on chairs against the walls. They were blankly staring off into space. No, Shirley doesn't belong here with them. She was fine when I last saw her. But then, Shirley was always fine. Gentle and soft-spoken, she somehow had managed to provide for her chil-

dren in spite of her husband. Susan looked at some patients who were lying listlessly on the cold floor. A girl walked around grasping a headless doll by the arm.

She's here in this place. I don't understand. I don't believe the doctors or the police. I don't believe any of them. They're all wrong. They're wrong! She couldn't have—no, it's not in her. Shirley is gentle. She wouldn't hurt a fly. No, I don't believe it. I won't believe it. I'm going to help. They'll see they're wrong. Shirley wouldn't shoot that old lady. They said she just went mad——not Shirley. They must be mistaken.

Susan's mind jerked back to the present when she heard the rattle of keys reopen the door to the ward. Shirley was being led by the nurse. Susan's heart began beating faster. She felt the blood rushing in her temples. She took a few steps forward to greet her sister. Stopping a few feet in front of her, she said, "Shirley. . ." her voice shook as she spoke. "I came as soon as I could. You called me. . .I'm here to help."

Shirley looked up. Her empty eyes stared into Susan's. She stood limply, her shoulders sagging. A piece of stray hair hung loosely in her face.

"Shirley? It's me, Susan." She raised her hand to fix Shirley's hair, but stopped midway.

Shirley's eyes still stared. Grabbing onto the nurse's arm Shirley called out, "Susan!. . .I want her. Call Susan. . .Call Susan."

SISTER ELAINE KINDLE, S.D.S.H.

MERRY–GO–ROUND

Bridled tigers swim in circles
Chasing plastic ponies
Around mirrors that wink
At laughing three foot riders.
Blue swans bob and dip on spinning poles
Clutched by sticky fingers.
Peppermint zebras waltz in time
To the organ's pump and swirl
Leading speckled leopards
In the dizzy, whirling dance until
The flying course spins out—
And then, the racers lunge and strain
Against the slowing track and
Push and stretch for one more whirl—
But fail—and freeze
Before the organ's final shiver.

MARGARET ANTCZAK

CARMEN YANEZ

PRUFROCK LOOKS AT TIME

J. Alfred Prufrock is man isolated from reality by his own inability to act. He has "measured out his life with coffee spoons." In T.S. Eliot's "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" time becomes the measure of Prufrock's lonely life. Prufrock's pathetic/comic interior monologue as he walks to a tea party, interweaves the past, the present and the future. As he compares his ineffectual life to the lives of great men and their lasting deeds, history has neither majesty nor meaning to Prufrock. Colored by "narrow streets" and "lonely men in shirt-sleeves," Prufrock's present is like a yellow fog which obstructs his view of a more noble world. Prufrock senses that his future will also be unrewarding because he has done nothing to prepare for it.

First, Prufrock alludes to three heroes of the past whose deeds have survived the sweep of history. These men—Michelangelo, Hamlet and John the Baptist—had been able to make a commitment to some cause. They are time-honored figures who were able to do something significant during their lifetimes. By comparison, Prufrock's life is meaningless.

Although Prufrock does not directly compare himself to Michelangelo, the allusion to the artist illuminates Prufrock's meekness. "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo." Prufrock speaks in a sing-song tone of the tributes made to the beauty of the strong masculine figures which Michelangelo created years before. In contrast to the strength of Michelangelo's art, Prufrock's mimicry of the women seems small. Envy is the cause of Prufrock's comment on the women's talk. Michelangelo is worthy of conversation among women whom Prufrock cannot dare to face.

Prufrock does, on the other hand, compare himself to Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet. Prufrock knows that he is not one to carry an action through. He is "not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be." Shakespeare's Hamlet was initially doubtful and unsure of his ability to act but later he resolved his indecisiveness and finally took a blundering, impulsive action. Prufrock fails to act at all. However, like Hamlet's, Prufrock's excessive thinking—"a hundred indecisions"—paralyzes him.

There is much to be said in contrasting Prufrock's life to these heroic figures. The most illuminating contrast, however, is evident as Prufrock compares himself to John the Baptist.

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
brought in upon a platter
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter.

In Luke's gospel account, he describes John as "the voice of one crying in the desert 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make straight his paths,' " (Lk. 3:4). John was beheaded for criticizing Herod for marrying his brother's wife. John had the courage of his convictions. Prufrock does not. Like John the Baptist, Prufrock has "wept and fasted, wept and prayed." He has figuratively looked inward by fasting and sought outwardly by praying for the strength he needs to act. Prufrock is not the prophet who announces salvation with conviction. He cannot. It does not matter that Prufrock has faith in the outcome of a decision to act because he knows he is incapable of making any decision—"and here's no great matter." He does not consider himself nor his actions of any worth.

As the magnaminous deeds of three historical figures underscored Prufrock's weaknesses, three images—an etherised patient, a yellow fog and a tea party—serve to intensify Prufrock's estimation of his present lifestyle. Prufrock is timid to the point of passivity. He is lost in a haze of non-committment; he is fearful, balancing on the verge of inertia.

Easily, Prufrock thinks of himself as a "patient etherised upon a table." As he walks through desolated streets, Prufrock exists in a dream-like state where he cannot grasp the fullness of life's meaning. Prufrock dazedly perceives all of the images which enter his life. He walks past "half-deserted streets,/The muttering retreats/Of restless nights in one night cheap hotels/And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells." The sights and sounds of the street are indistinct. Images, voices and human feeling mesh and stagnate in the crevices of Prufrock's mind. Prufrock is that "etherised patient" for whom every question is overwhelming and every decision, critical. He cannot feel. He is numbed by his chronic indecisiveness. He exaggerates the importance of every decision by wondering if he dares "disturb the universe."

The present of Prufrock's anesthetized life is a yellow fog.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon
the window panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle
on the window panes. . .
Curled once about the house and fell
asleep.

All of Prufrock's perceptions are obscured by this yellow smoke. The smoke "rubs its back" like an animal, instinctively attempting to comfort itself. The smoke "curled once about the house," seeking the security of the fetal position and finding it, falls asleep. Prufrock reacts to life like the smoke. He tries to comfort himself with his thoughts while seeking the security of non-action. The smoke blocks the windows through which enlightenment might enter Prufrock's life.

Prufrock wants the sleep, the oblivion, that the fog offers. He avoids immediate attention to any problem that might arise by allowing "time/For the yellow smoke that slides along the street." he leaves room in his life for indecision and inactivity.

Because Prufrock allows indecisiveness to enter his life as a yellow smoke, he feels there is "time yet for a hundred indecisions/And for a hundred visions and revisions before the taking" of tea and toast. He allows himself to consider whether he should "turn back and descend the stair" as he proceeds to make his visit to the tea party. He is confused as he prepares to enter the room. "In a minute there is time/For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." So Prufrock remains standing on the stairs between the yellow smoke-filled streets and the "voices dying with a dying fall/Beneath the music from a farther room."

The party represents all the things that Prufrock fears. He cannot bear the scrutiny of those "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase." He feels as if he is an insect "sprawling on a pin. . .wriggling on the wall," pinned for disection just as he is an etherised patient on an operating table. He feels helpless because he is not sure of what to do or what to say—"Then how should I begin/To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?/And how should I presume?" Prufrock can relate only to the lonely and empty objects which encumber his life—"Shall I say I have gone at dusk through the narrow streets/And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes/of lonely men in shirt-sleeves leaning out of windows?" He knows that this is not the conversation one would engage in at a party. Prufrock knows that he does not belong in that farther room where the party takes place.

Prufrock thinks he "should have been a pair of ragged claws,/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." His existence would then be void of any chance of decision-making. His purpose for being would be clearly defined. Prufrock would be perfectly suited to "scuttle" aimlessly across the span of his lifetime.

Prufrock's present is clouded by doubt and indecisiveness. His future is destined to be the same. As he considers his future, he thinks of Lazarus who was raised from the dead,
(Jn. 12: 1-2)

> Would it have been worth it, after all,
> After the cups, the marmalade, the tea. . .
> Would it have been worth while. . .
> To have squeezed the universe into a ball
> To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
> To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
> Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'

Prufrock's problem in life extends beyond the "porcelain" and "skirts that trail along the floor." He wants to know with certainty if his actions—if his life—would be, in the final analysis, worthwhile. Lazarus' life was a full and rich one. His death and resurrection only enhanced the depth of his experience. Conversely Prufrock's life is so ineffectual that his death would only be an end to his misery.

Prufrock envisions himself as an old man, much like the ones he has seen leaning out of windows. "I shall wear white flannel trousers and walk upon the beach." Prufrock sees his future life as desolated and futile. He "shall wear the bottoms of his trousers rolled," never allowing the sea to touch him.

Prufrock's life will still be cramped by indecision. Yet, his concerns grow more insignificant as he grows older—"Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" Questions will still overwhelm Prufrock and the most simple decisions shall continue to torment him.

Prufrock knows that he is not a great man nor will he ever be. "I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each./I do not think they will sing to me." The mermaids, who sang to ancient Greek heroes returning from long voyages, figure greatly in Prufrock's evaluation of his life. Prufrock is no hero. He has done nothing worthy of adulation; he has not committed himself to any great cause. Prufrock has "watched the moment of his greatness flicker/. . .he was afraid."

Prufrock has "seen the mermaids riding seaward on the waves/Combing the white hair of the waves blown back/When the winds blows the water white and black." The mermaids, traditionally carefree creatures, are able to swim against the rush of the waves; they have learned to live with and conquer the sea. By contrast, their ability to survive in their environment illuminates what Prufrock has failed to do. Every phase of Prufrock's life is victorious over Prufrock's shallow attempts at gaining control.

The question forever lingering on his tongue, choking him into a state of passiveness, Prufrock reflects "almost, at times, the Fool." As he examines his life, by comparing himself to historical giants, by analyzing his present predicament and by evaluating his future, Prufrock realizes that he is a man isolated from reality by his own inability to act. Prufrock is impotent. The man is conquered by his indecisiveness. He is defeated by his doubtfulness. Prufrock cannot measure up to the nobility of heroic figures. He remains shrouded in a yellow fog of apathy. Prufrock will always be a man who is drowned by the futility of his dreams.

LYNNE BOWLES

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLUE BALLOON

I. jaunty rebel
upsidedown
exclamation point

II. nose pressed to
blue prison
I look out at
convexed faces

III. blue magic
dancing at
string's beginning

IV. child's spherical world
with blue plastic icecaps

V. And now, ladies and gentlemen,
direct from Las Vegas,
Miss Flame LaRose

VI. whimsical
rainy day
blues chaser

VII. Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday get your
Grubby hands off my ball—oooon
Happy birthday to you

VIII. a balloon treadmill
always going
never arriving

IX. air shapes a balloon
like a girdle-in-reverse

X. squeeeek!
eyelids clash
ears curl
spine jangles

XI. Twinkle, twinkle blue balloon
In the sun of brightest June
Up above the world so high
Looking down with
one
blue
eye

XII. a ballon in hand
is worth two on the ceiling

XIII. POP!
and another friend
gone
forever

SHARON CRISS

MARINA KONTOS

THE LION'S SURPRISE

"Mother! I never get to do anything!" Liz dropped the knife into the mayonnaise jar. It bounced and rattled against the glass. "Why can't Jimmy take care of himself? He's not a baby any more!" She shoved the sandwich into the wax paper bag and flung it into the lunch pail.

Mrs. Chaffey wearily pushed back a stray hair. "Liz, he's only six years old! I can't leave him alone at night. You know I don't get off work until eleven tonight. I don't think it's too much to ask of you. There'll be other games."

"Oh, Mom!" Liz slammed the lid shut and ran to her room, banging the door behind her.

The awful knot inside her broke as soon as the door shut. Hot tears blurred her eyes as she groped around for her clothes. She zipped up her uniform skirt and furiously yanked a brush through her hair. She stepped back to survey herself in the mirror. The girl in the glass stared back at her defiantly, her puffy eyes and reddened nose framed in a cloud of flyaway hair. The pleated skirt was too long and emphasized her plump figure.

Liz hesitated momentarily, her hands clenching the skirt. Then, with deliberation, she rolled the waistband over twice and stretched her vest down over it.

Mom would get mad if she saw it. Oh, too bad! I'm sick of looking fat and ugly. The angry thoughts collided and spun around in her head, as she coated her lashes with mascara. I'm never going to have any fun! I've missed almost every game. I'm sick of rushing home to babysit every night! She doesn't have to work nights. She could switch if she really cared!

Liz gathered up her books and stalked through the kitchen, deliberately ignoring her mother, who sat sipping coffee at the table. Little Jimmy was sitting next to Mrs. Chaffey, shoveling Cocoa Puffs into his mouth. Milk dribbled down his chin onto his pajamas as he intently studied the prizes on the cereal box.

"Jimmy! Stop that!" Liz snapped, as he tipped the bowl to his mouth to catch the sugary milk left at the bottom. Jimmy's eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Liz!" Mrs. Chaffey interrupted sharply, "I'll do the correcting in this house."

"I'm late for school. I've gotta go." Liz glared at her mother as she rushed out the back door.

"Be home by three," Mrs. Chaffey called after her. The kitchen door slammed in reply.

Liz didn't get home until four o'clock. The house was quiet except for the ticking of the kitchen clock. Jimmy wasn't home yet. Liz threw her books down on a chair and picked up the note propped up in the fruit basket.

"Dear Liz," it read, "please dust and vacuum the bedrooms. Fix the hamburger for dinner. I'm sorry about the game. Love, Mom."

Liz was crumpling up the note when Jimmy tore into the house. "Lizzie, Lizzie!" he called as he shed his jacket and kicked off his shoes. "Guess what? I get to be the lion in the play! Can you make me a lion costume?"

"A lion costume? What play?"

"The class is gonna do a play about a mean lion and a little mouse. Miss Taylor said I could be the lion because I growled the best. Grrrrrrr! Grrrrrrr!" Jimmy bared his teeth and swung his arms wildly in her face.

Liz laughed, despite herself, at the thought of little Jimmy playing a fierce lion. "When's the play?" she asked.

"Next Friday. It's at night and Miss Taylor said that all parents can come. I asked if sisters could come too—and she said yes—so you can come!" he blurted out all in one breath. His eyes sparkled.

"What kind of costume do you need?" Liz asked.

"It has to look like a real live lion. It has to be scary!" Jimmy's brown eyes grew serious. "We have to bring it to the 'hearsal on Friday."

"Rehearsal," Liz corrected him with a smile. "We can go to Newberry's tomorrow and get the material, O.K.?"

"O.K.!" Jimmy grinned.

Jimmy chattered all through dinner, but Liz only half-listened to him.

The game's probably starting now, she thought wistfully. The keen disappointment of this morning was still there, but it lessened the more she thought about the invitation to Gloria Simpson's party.

Gloria Simpson was the sophomore class president. Liz had always admired her. In her daydreams, Liz imagined herself as a vivacious, dark-haired Gloria, surrounded by admiring football players.

Slim, blond and well-dressed, Gloria wore her beautiful clothes with a deliberate casualness. Whenever she stood next to Gloria, Liz became acutely conscious of her own non-existent waistline and frizzy hair.

Gloria was naturally popular with the guys. The whole class had followed her recent romance with a senior quarterback as faithfully as a t.v. soap opera.

So naturally, Liz was surprised and flattered when Gloria had stopped her in the hall that afternoon.

"Liz," Gloria smiled brightly, "you're coming to my party next Friday, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't really know yet." A personal invitation from Gloria! Liz could hardly believe it.

"Liz, you have to come! I want the whole class to be there. Lots of guys are coming and we're getting a band. If you need a ride, Jan Phillips can pick you up."

"O.K. That sounds neat. I'll be there!" Liz was surprised to hear her voice saying.

"Great! See you later, Liz." Gloria flashed her bright smile.

I'm not going to miss this party for anything, Liz thought as she gathered up the dinner dishes. Mom won't be working Friday night, so she can take Jimmy to his play. Everything was going to work out this time, she assured herself.

Liz lay awake for an hour just thinking about the party before she finally fell asleep that night.

Morning came too soon. Someone was shaking her gently. She struggled to lift her heavy eyelids. "Lizzie, Lizzie!" the small voice whispered. "Get up! We have to go get the costume now."

Liz propped herself up on one elbow and glanced at the clock. "Jimmy! It's only 7:30 and it's Saturday! We have all day," she groaned.

"Well, let's be the first ones there," said Jimmy. He was already dressed. He had even washed his face and combed his hair. His eyes were wide awake and shining.

"The stores aren't even open yet, Jimmy." Liz started to crawl back under the covers.

"Come on. Get up!" He tugged on her arm and started to tickle her.

"O.K. I'm getting up." Liz laughed and grumbled at the same time.

Mrs. Chaffey was fixing breakfast when Liz walked into the kitchen. She was listening with amusement to Jimmy's explanation of the shopping trip.

"We're getting my costume for the play. I'm the lion and the hunters catch me in a big net. You have to come, Mom, and Lizzie's supposed to come too, 'cause there's a big surprise for you after the play!"

"Morning, Mom." Liz avoided her mother's eyes as she sat down at the table. The memory of yesterday's argument rushed painfully back to her.

"Good morning, honey." Mrs. Chaffey's voice was warm. Liz looked up to her mother's smile and knew that yesterday had been forgotten.

They went shopping after breakfast. Jimmy discovered some brown flannel that was "furry and warm like a lion." When they got home, he supervised the pattern drawing, cutting and pinning. He hung over the machine while Liz fed the flannel under the whirring needle. Liz was so preoccupied in a daydream that she forgot he was there. In her dream she was dancing with a handsome senior at Gloria's party or laughing in a circle of chattering friends. She saw herself moving easily from group to group, teasing and joking with everyone, casually tossing her smooth hair about her shoulders.

Liz dreamed and planned all week. She went shopping on Thursday afternoon and bought a new outfit. She arranged with Jan Phillips for a ride. Everything was set. She scarcely noticed Jimmy's growing excitement. Every afternoon he practiced his part and ran around the house in his costume until bedtime.

Friday came at last! Liz was up early. While she was dressing, her mother came in and sat down on the bed.

"Liz, I can't make it to Jimmy's play tonight. Three people on the evening shift are out with the flu, so I've got to work tonight. So be sure to get Jimmy to school on time tonight. The Martins can take both of you home afterwards."

"But, Mother! I can't take him! The party's tonight."

"What party?" Mrs. Chaffey's eyes were puzzled.

"Gloria Simpson's party! I told you about it last week. You said I could go!" Her voice was growing shrill.

"Oh, Liz, I'm so sorry. I completely forgot about it."

"Mom, this happens every single time. I'm sick of it!" Liz sobbed. "Why should I miss my party for his stupid little play?"

"Elizabeth!" her mother spoke sharply. "That's enough!"

"Liz, I thought you were old enough to understand. One of us has to go. You know how much Jimmy's counting on this. He was so disappointed when I told him I couldn't go."

Liz couldn't speak any more. A huge lump was obstructing her throat. The knot of anger tightened inside her. She turned and ran from the room as the tears began.

It was horrible at school. Each time someone mentioned the party, Liz almost burst into tears. She raged inside all day. By the end of the day, she had determined to go.

When Jan comes to pick me up, she schemed, we can take Jimmy to school and go on to the party. Mom won't ever find out.

That evening Jimmy was too excited to eat his dinner. He was ready in his costume an hour before it was time to leave. "Hurry up and get ready, Lizzie. We can't be late." He bounced on the edge of the bed while Liz combed her hair in front of the mirror.

When Jan arrived at 7:30, Liz pushed Jimmy out to the car filled with laughing girls. "Oh, he's so cute!" Everyone admired his costume and teased him all the way to school. Jimmy just smiled shyly and wouldn't say a word.

After the car pulled up outside the school yard, Liz walked Jimmy to the classroom door. "I saved you a seat, right in front, so you can see me, Lizzie. Somebody might take it if you don't get it." Jimmy's eyes were large and serious.

"Honey, I won't be able to stay. You can tell me all about it tomorrow," Liz rushed. Jan was honking the horn and the girls were waving to her to hurry up.

Jimmy's face crumpled. His lower lip began to tremble. "But Lizzie, you said you were coming." His eyes were disbelieving. "Don't you want to see the surprise?" His voice was small and tearful.

The horn blared again. "Jimmy, I've gotta go now. Be a good lion." Tears trickled down his cheeks and short sobs shook his chest. "Jimmy, don't cry. You're a big boy! I'll come next time." She tried to pat him on the head, but he turned his face away.

Jan pressed long and hard on the horn. They were all calling to her. Jimmy was still sobbing. Liz tried to hug him, but he shrugged her arms off.

"Come on, Liz!" Jan called impatiently.

Liz looked at Jimmy helplessly. A horrible feeling flooded through her as the tug o' war in her mind grew more fierce. She wanted to cry. The impatient voices cut through her thoughts and drew her forward, and suddenly she was running to the waiting car.

"It's about time!" the voices greeted her as she squeezed in. Liz said nothing. As the car edged away from the curb, she forced her eyes toward the window. The little figure still stood in the open doorway. She pressed her face to the window and cried silently.

MARGARET ANTCZAK

RAMONA KAN